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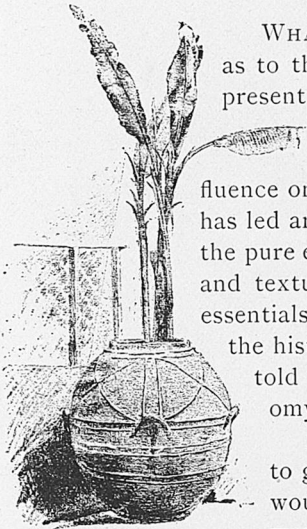
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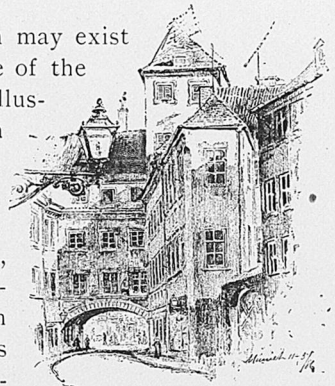
# A MAGICIAN OF LINE

BY JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

*With original illustrations by Harley D. Nichols.*



WHATEVER difference of opinion may exist as to the effect on current literature of the present plethora of pictures in our illustrated magazines, there can be little doubt that the influence on our art has been good. It has led artists to fix their attention on the pure elements of composition, form, and texture, and to eliminate all non-essentials. There was never a time in the history of art when the artist has told his story with so much economy, point, and breadth as now.



RATH'S THOR. (MUNICH.)

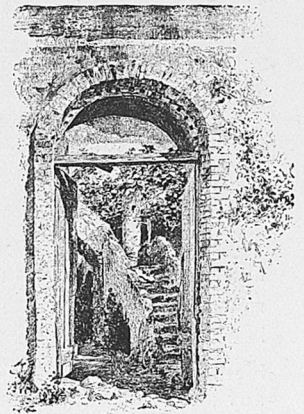
An untrained mind, required to give a representation of Nature as she appears to him, would begin to think of her color, solidity, and detail; and were he told that the effect of all these could be sufficiently given by means of a few black lines on a piece of white paper, he would think he was being made the victim of the American joke. But give him plenty of blue, green, red and yellow paints, let him wreak his will in body-color, and allow him a magnifying-glass to work up detail withal, and he will regard you as an intelligent friend.

But the artist's work is ruled by three divinities—

Truth, Imagination, and Selection. The two former belong to his character and temperament; the latter is the whole issue of his artistic study, training, and experience. An artist might be called a selector. Unless he can choose, out of the medley nature offers him, the culminating point, the characteristic line, all his desire for truth and fervor of imagination avail him nothing. Among our contemporary artists and illustrators in black and



A CORNER IN GABLES. (MUNICH.)



THE HAUNTED GATE. (CAPRI.)

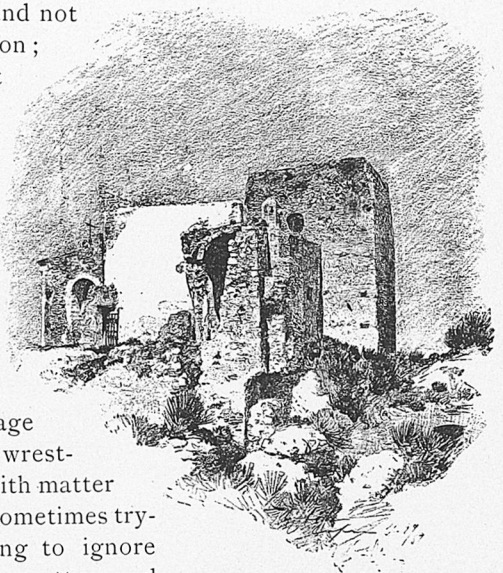
white, not all are always loyal to truth, and not many are endowed with creative imagination ; but not one of those whose work has got into the best magazines has failed to evince the acquired faculty of selection, and it is upon that that the entire modern art of wood-engraving has been built.

It is an art accordant with the spirit of our age, this study of the resources of line. In all forms of art, as well as in all ways of life, we are become impatient of minutiae ; we demand the epitome, the essence, the bull's-eye, the upshot. We hear the age called material ; but it is an age

of spirit wrestling with matter

—sometimes trying to ignore matter, and see in its appearances only spirit in disguise.

And these refined and pregnant drawings in pen and ink, or with the etching-point, are the very spirit of pictorial art ; the spirit implying and suggest-

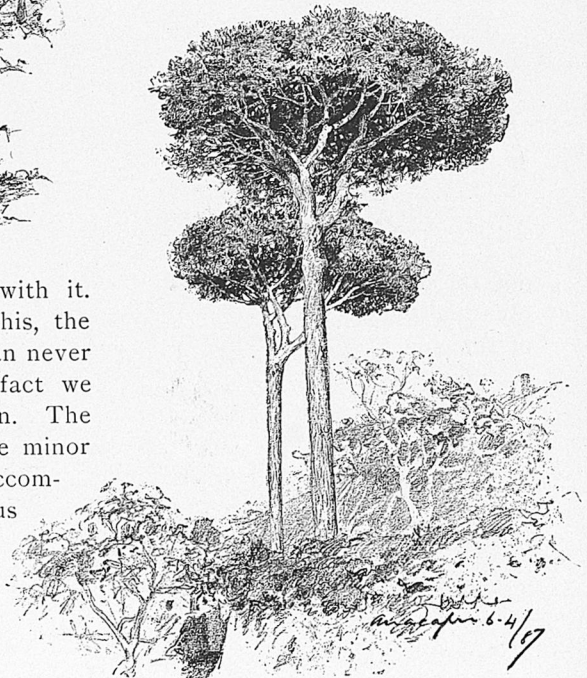


THE FORGOTTEN PAST. (CAPRI.)



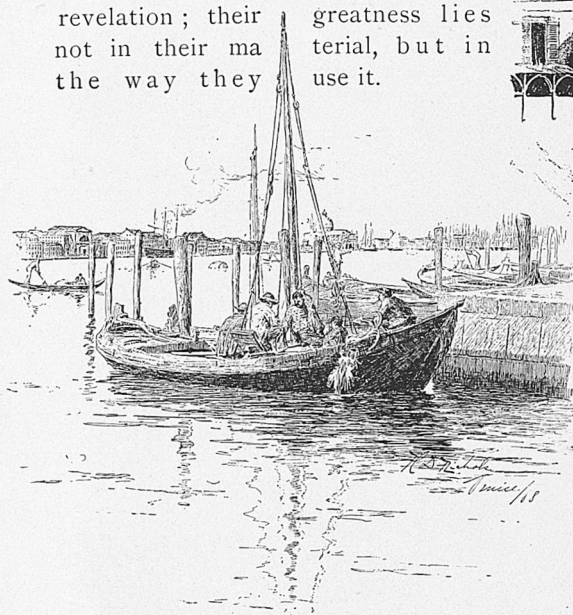
RUIN IN BLOOM. (CAPRI.)

ing the body, yet not hampered with it. There is profound significance in this, the mystic wisdom of reticence. We can never represent Nature as she is ; this fact we learn when we cease to be children. The painter, then, sings his song in the minor key ; he suggests what cannot be accomplished ; he contents himself and us with a truth that is true relatively, though it may not be so literally. And he compensates for his impotence to make real sunshine glow from his canvas by marshalling the wild and haphazard mate-



THE RIVAL OF THE PALM. (CAPRI.)

rial before him into expressions of personal emotion and thought. Out of the tumultuous alphabet of the universe he chooses those letters which utter the word of his soul—what he has felt and believed. Titian, Turner, Millet, Corot reveal to us in their pictures the secret story of their experience and creed of life. It makes small difference what subject they may select as the medium of the revelation; their greatness lies not in their material, but in the way they use it.



SUNSHINE AND COLOR. (VENICE.)

out, the more we are stimulated to supply; and that which we supply is purely of the spirit. We take these delicate skeletons of form wrought on the pregnant negative of paper, and project thereon not the dull hues of the palette, nor even the potent tints of nature, but the color that is within nature, the light that never was, on sea or land, the pure beauty which matter hints of, but never compasses. In no other way can this glory be realized. The painter sets his own limit and must abide there; but the artist in line gives us wings on which we may rise to



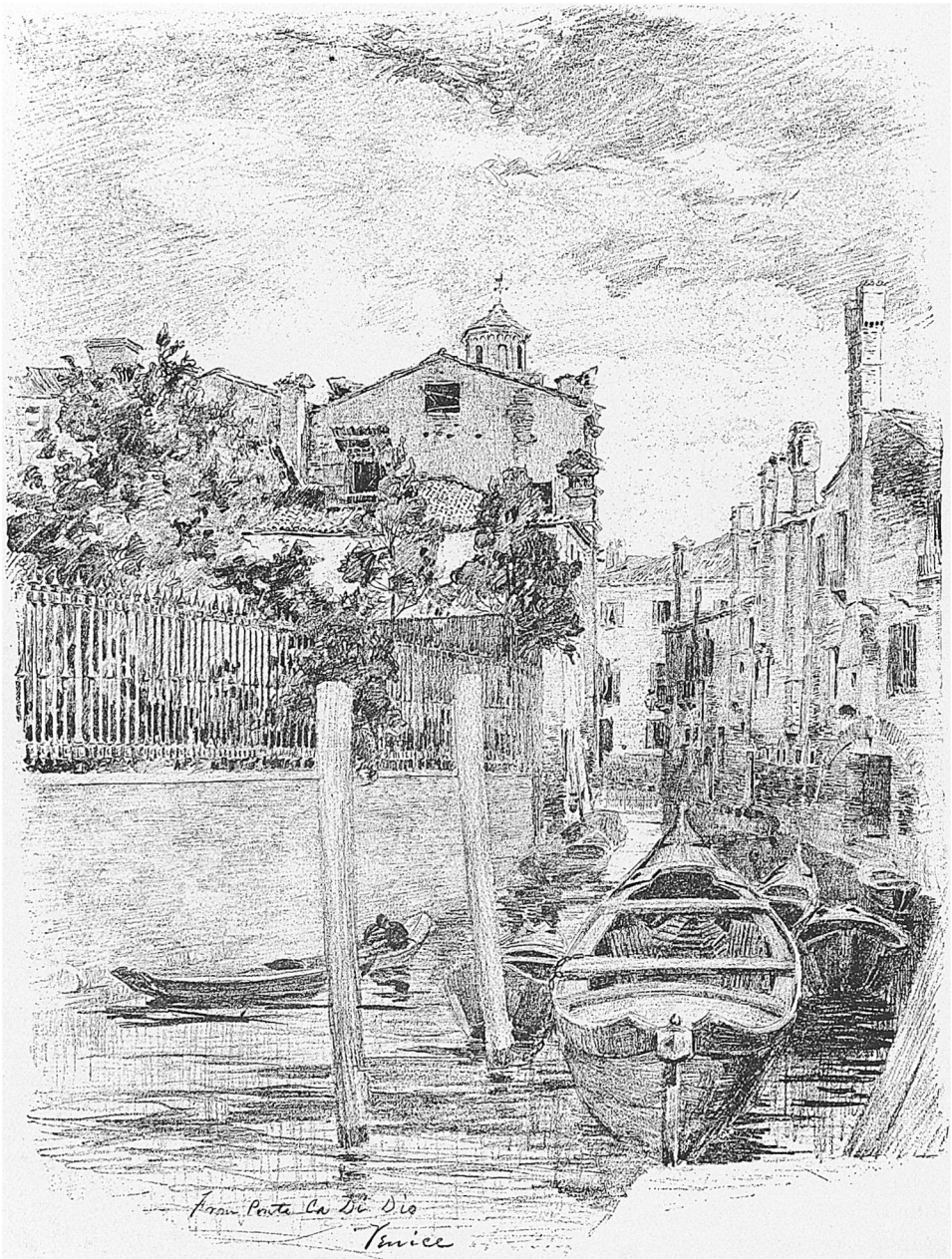
THE HOUSE OF THE BELLA DONNA. (GENOA.)

The artist in black and white, and especially in line, takes a step beyond the painter. He makes us contributors to and associates in his work; the more he dares to leave



THE WHISPER OF THE PALM. (CAPRI.)





WAYS OF WATER. (VENICE.)

heights limited only by our own insight and enlightenment. Only, the wings must be fashioned aright. All depends on that.

I know not where I could find a better text for the sermon than in these exquisite little drawings by Nichols. Their beauty and efficiency appear at a glance, as well as upon study. Each one is the very *mot d'enigme* of the subject treated. The Japanese simplicity of that pot with a plant in it at the head of this paper serves



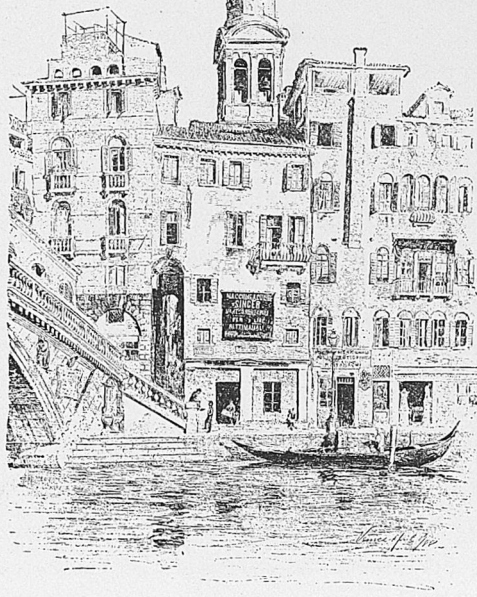
TURQUOISE AND OPAL. (VENICE.)



A BUSINESS POINT OF VIEW. (VENICE.)

torrid Capri, and in and out of the labyrinth of Venice, he never disappoints us with a clumsy or unmeaning touch. The technique of his drawing is irreproachable, and his composition is always intelligent and not seldom masterly. Our modern love of accurate fact has led us to prefer the photograph, or one or other of the numerous photographic reproductive processes, as means of illustration to the ordinary "picturesque sketch" of the touring artist. We dread exaggeration from the personal equation of the latter; whereas we know that the photograph, however ill it may compose, is at all events precise and literal; if we were to visit the scene ourselves, so and not

as keynote to the other specimens of his work. And whether he leads us amidst the tiled and gabled roofs, along the grotesque alleys and beneath the queer archways of the German city, or conjures us to Italy, to wander among sun-steeped ruins, beneath stone pines (sole successful rivals of the tropic palm), along the lovely sweep of Geneva's marble houses, up the delicious heights of



BESIDE THE RIALTO. (VENICE.)

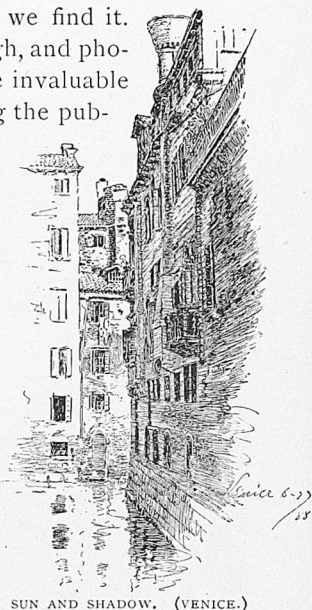


ON FOOT IN VENICE.

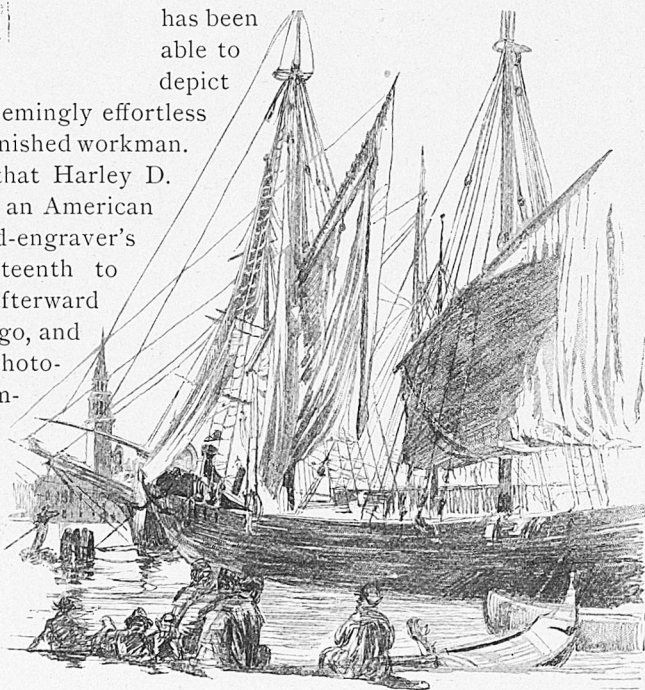
them with that lucid and seemingly effortless fidelity which avouches the finished workman.

It is pleasant to know that Harley D. Nichols is a young man, and an American of the Northwest. A wood-engraver's apprentice from his seventeenth to his twenty-first year, he afterward studied from the life in Chicago, and practised pen-drawing for photo-engraving reproduction. Coming to New York in 1881, he benefited by the criticism of Parsons, of *Harper's*, and Fraser, of the *Century*. At present writing he is in California, where, for such a man as he, happiness is sure to abound, and fame to increase; and with his fame, the credit and value of American art.

otherwise should we find it. This is true enough, and photography has done invaluable service in teaching the public how to detect careless and unconscientious work. But such drawings as these of Nichols are benefited, not injured, by the personal equation; for it has led the artist to pick out the meaning phrases of the scene only, instead of distorting what he has seen to accord with a narrow and disproportioned mannerism. Having picked them out, moreover, his educated hand has been able to depict



SUN AND SHADOW. (VENICE.)



"SHIPS, SHIPS, I WILL DESCRIBE YOU." (VENICE.)